

persisting effort to master those speculations. Besides the too prevailing and still increasing indisposition to metaphysical study in any school, there is a settled conviction that those speculations were baseless and useless, and that who-ever aspires to the high and abstracted wisdom must learn it from the later philosophers. And as the only thing we can seek and value in pure abstracted speculations is truth, when the persuasion of their truth is gone their attraction and influence are extinct. That which could please the imagination or interest the affections, might in a considerable degree continue to please and interest them, though convicted of much fallacy. But that which is too subtile and intangible to please the imagination, loses all its power when it is rejected by the judgment. This is the predicament to which time has reduced the metaphysics of the old philosophers. The captivation of their systems seems almost as far withdrawn from us as the songs of their Syrens, or the enchantments of Medea.

While these thin speculations have been suspended in air, taking all the forms and colours of clouds or rainbows, meteors or fogs, the didactic morality of some of the ancient philosophers, faithfully keeping to the solid ground of human interests, has doubtless had a considerable influence on the moral sentiments of cultivated men, progressively on to the present time. A certain quality, derived from it into literature, has perpetuated its operation indirectly on many who are not conversant with it immediately at its origin. But it may have a considerable direct influence on those who are in acquaintance with the great primary moralists themselves. After a long detention among the vagaries and monsters of mythology, or a bewildered adventure in the tenebrious and fantastic region of ancient metaphysics, in chase of that truth which the pursuer sometimes thinks, though doubtfully, that he sees, but which still eludes him, the student of antiquity is gratified at meeting with a sage who leads him among interesting realities, and discourses to him in plain and impressive terms of direct instruction concerning moral principles and the means of happiness. And since it is necessarily the substantial object of this instruction to enforce virtue, excellence, goodness, he feels little apprehension of any vitiating effect on his moral sentiments.

He entirely forgets that moral excel-